

December 2015
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GPO BOX 249
CANBERRA ACT 2601

FIELD NATURALISTS' ASSOCIATION OF CANBERRA INC.

FIELD NATTER

MEETING—THURSDAY 3 December 2015

7:30 pm Australian National University

Gould Seminar Room, Building 116, Daley Road, ANU, ACT

details back page

FNAC Christmas party

Please note the change of venue and earlier start time of 6:00 pm

It is our Christmas Get-together in the downstairs BOZO Tea-room. Please bring your own food, refreshments, plates and glasses with something to share. It's a good old natter time. Do come along and join us.



Contents

44th Black Mountain annual wildflower walk	2
A landcarer's seven days of specials and subsequent musings	3
Duck shooting season	5
Road safety	6
Black Ridge	6

44th Black Mountain annual wildflower walk

Saturday 10 October 2015

Thank you to the Friends of Black Mountain for organising this fascinating walk. After recovering from the mistaken implication that 'this Rosemary' was to lead a walk we joined Rosemary Purdie for an informative and educational several hours traversing one section of Black Mountain, which covered disturbed ground under the power line, creek vegetation and open forest dominated by *Eucalyptus rossii* (Scribbly Gum), *E. mannifera* (Brittle Gum), and *E. macrorhyncha* (Red Stringy Bark). The downslopes tended to produce a grassy woodland.

I don't propose to produce a comprehensive list of species we noted but to point out the information and questions Rosemary asked, which should help us in further identification.

Leptospermum multicaule (Silver tea tree). Do the blossoms and fruit remind you of another species? They are in the same family as the eucalypts – family Myrtaceae.

Pultenaea procumbens (heathy bush pea). Does the colour vary within the species? Some are more yellow/orange; others a deeper orange. A sub-shrub with woody stems.



Pultenaea procumbens

Lomandra longifolia – dioecious i.e. separate male (anthers) and female (pistol) plants. How is it pollinated? Wind! *L. longifolia* grows to one metre and has two or three teeth on the tip of the strap-like leaf.

Chrysocephalum apiculatum (common everlasting, yellow buttons) - hermaphroditic i.e. the flower has both male and female organs. The outside bracts look like petals and the centre consists of numerous florets, which when fertilised produce seeds. Wind can disperse the seed.

Exocarpos cupressiformis (native or black cherry, cherry Ballart) A hemiparasitic tree obtains some nourishment from its host but also photosynthesises. The seed appears below an orange or red fleshy modified flower base. The red flesh can be eaten (not unlike jelly ju-jubes).

Kunzea parvifolia (violet kunzea). Which other plant has blossoms with similar long anthers? Gums! *Kunzea* is related to the eucalypts – family Myrtaceae. It grows where it has access to the light hence the open spaces beneath the powerline easement.

Dillwynia phyllicoides (small-leaved parrot-pea) and *Dillwynia sericea* (showy parrot-pea). How do we differentiate between the two? Look carefully at the linear leaves. In *D. phyllicoides* they are spirally twisted, in *D. sericea* the leaves are straight.

Acacia genistifolia has phyllodes not leaves. They are thin and spiny with a sharp tip and have no stomates, which means the plant saves water. All acacias have a gland on their phyllodes. No gland? Not

an Acacia! *Acacia parramattensis* has two evenly spaced glands between each pair of larger leaflets along the phyllode midrib while *Acacia mearnsii* has numerous irregularly spaced glands.



Craspedia variabilis



Oxylobium ellipticum

Stylidium graminifolium (grass triggerplant) How are these pollinated? When insects land on the flower they trigger the anthers to spring down and deposit pollen on their body.

Hibbertia riparia is hermaphroditic. The flower's centre is worth a close look as the anthers are clumped together on one side and the stigma are on the other.

Rosemary von Behrens

A landcarer's seven days of specials and subsequent musings

Monday 2nd October

Two of us on a working-bee destroyed the seeding chances of 50 Serrated Tussock plants in several clusters on Mt Rogers. Another Landcare Group member had done a solo sortie spraying African Lovegrass and any Chilean Needle Grass plants he found. It's a worthwhile exercise as, for the moment, Mt Rogers is relatively free of these invasive species. Our reward was Lyndon's photo of our second, known, Frogmouth nest with incubating father.

Tuesday 3rd October

A friend who's newly returned to live in Canberra, phoned whilst walking on his new patch; Lyneham Ridge. During the conversation he came across two Speckled Warblers foraging with other mixed-feeding-flock species near a large bush. I later came across a parent Silvereye feeding a very young, tail-less, chick in a friend's front yard.

Friday 6th October

Instead of our fortnightly weeding session on The Pinnacle our group of six changed venues to the offset land south of The Pinnacle and north of William Hovell Drive. Tree Martins hawked for insects above and around an ancient paddock-eucalypt. Perhaps the Thursday evening drenching had encouraged insects to hatch. How different to ours is the vision of these on-the-wing feeders?

As we moved through the lightly grazed ex-paddock I realised that grassland flora was coming to life species by species, page by page. There's so much delight in finding plants that have been

lost from my usual walking venues. A patch of Common Fringe Lilies, in bud, caught our attention. As we wondered whether they would open with more sun we realised there were two clumps of Trigger plants nearby, even more unusual. Others had walked on towards a damper area, finding Golden Weather Grass *Hypoxis hygrometrica* and a few Onion orchids *Microtis uniflora*. blue Isotoma and golden-bronze Sundews. Scaly Buttons *Leptorhynchus squamatus* added novelty as earlier beacons: patches of *Vellea* and *Chrysocephalum apiculatum* were exciting for their sheer extent. There'll be an electric-blue show from Blue Devils in a few more days' time.

Saturday 7th October

An Umbagog discovery that there was a second *Pultenea subspicata* on the edge of a hazard reduction burn area we'd requested 'not be burnt'. This was our reward for destroying woody weeds during landcaring close to Ginninderra Creek, Latham.

Sunday 8th October

A chance to see the natural history of Lyneham Ridge was too good to miss. Even though our start was late for bird-watching we found an interesting array of 22 feeding and foraging species after entering from Salkauskas Crescent. The view of the Ridge's grassy-woodland from where Ginninderra Drive meets the Kaleen section of the GDE suggests weed-infestations but many native species are hanging-on in spite of patches of Horehound, scattered St John's Wort, Verbascum, Wild Salvia, Briar

Rose and flowering in 2015's exceptional sprummer.

The shrub storey is largely absent but a large African Boxthorn had both flowers and some berries. It's playing a vital, protective role for Wrens and the Speckled Warblers reported on 3rd. Not far away two massive stud Herefords settled into cud-chewing dozes. They play their part in controlling grass growth.

An Australian Painted Lady was laying eggs on Capeweed.

A Pardalote flew into a tunnel off a cavernous hollow in a huge eucalypt.

A Noisy Friarbird stripped bark off a Stringybark, flying deeper into the woodland with the material. A Kookaburra seeming to have a Legless Lizard in its beak flew straight to a Eucalypt hollow and almost instantly emerged in search of the next meal for its chick(s). It took no notice of the harassing presence of a Currawong or the appreciative humans.

Happening to look up into the trees off the main through-track the brain registered a Frogmouth with fluffy chick on a horizontal branch. Their iconic pose wasn't naturally branch-like. Three more Frogmouths were visible on a typical nest 15 m to the south.

Continuing to stroll north, a glance into the bush at 14.15 hours found the only-seen-on-TV-sight of boxing Kangaroos. In spite of being photographed and smartphone-videoed from 25 m away they were not-to-be-disturbed for possibly 15 minutes before the, presumably, challenger capitulated.



Velleias were spectacular and Blue Devils will be in a week or two... The flowering Serrated Tussock isolates need urgent attention but Lyneham Ridge is definitely a place for naturalists to visit. Thank goodness for benign neglect and 'minimal' management attention... another secret in the Bush Capital

Monday 9th November

Guiding Australian Native Plants Society members to a Pre-Conference trip from the AIS about 5 Superb Parrots were seen just before 09.00 hours.

Thursday 12th November

Roger Farrow shared their guided expedition to Namibia where they went beyond the more usually visited southern desert.... The scenery is often spectacularly different from even our own 'desert' places. Yet the messages are clear... the palette of extraordinary colours, diverse textures, wondrous geomorphology, the lack of water yet the adaptability of organisms utilising the almost haunting fogs that roll in from the coast, the lives of strange plants from familiar genera... the planet also has incredible secrets the curious and adventurous seek to explore and explain.

Natalie Maras' Interface: a journey between worlds exhibition

at the ANBG is an artistic interpretation of and homage to the soil crusts that bind the surface particles and organisms into a dynamic amalgam for larger plants. Through sketches, sculptures and miniature masterpieces using polymers, the journey of linking art with science takes newly imagined, novel routes.

Thank you for your tolerance. When I enjoy an experience or have observed nature's magic the urge to write is strong. Were it not for Alison's need for articles perhaps I'd leave my ramblings in notebooks.

At high school in the mid-fifties anyone who boasted like this was branded and derided as a braggart, a 'big-'ead' a show-off, someone too 'full of themselves'. Now, maybe, the missionary-zeal surfaces as the urge to teach or impart to others what one thinks one knows. I might even make the excuse that in describing journeys, making observations and describing events I am revealing potential treasures fortuitously found in the microcosm of the ACT and without the deficit of too many emissions.

We are so fortunate that, through presenters found by FNAC, NPA, COG, ANPS, and the ANBG Friends, we are able to experience other places, habitats

and species with minimal effort and maximum wonder. We have retained the curiosity that allows us to continue learning, investigating and recording within the classroom of the natural world. Let's thank those who share their journeys with us whilst still exploring the nooks and crannies around our homes.

Rosemary Blemings

Postscript: Following Rosemary's interesting observations I have some news myself.

John Brannon leads regular bird watching walks in the Pinnacle and this Spring decided to lead a second walk in early November.

He was puzzled by the sight of a female robin building a nest but at the same time feeding a juvenile. What puzzled him however, was that the female should have been a scarlet robin but showed absolutely no colour. The group watched them for quite some time trying to identify them and looking for a male to help with the identification.

John returned a few days later with bird expert Barbara, who again after observing for some time, identified them as a female and juvenile red-capped robins. What was exciting about this is that according to John, red-capped robins have not previously been reported as sighted at the Pinnacle.

Alison



Duck shooting season

Yes I have been out shooting ducks and ducklings in past weeks, but it is not what it at first seems. I have been 'shooting' them with my trusty camera.

It has certainly been an interesting Spring, with lots of bird breeding. First the water hens at Commonwealth Park, the ducklings at the botanic gardens and a plethora of ducklings at Edison Park in Woden, with no less than three broods of varying ages.

The oldest brood of six are quite large and perhaps just getting their wing feathers. The next family had nine chicks and the youngest family had an amazing 14 young. Fourteen! I don't think I've ever seen a brood that large. The decreasing number as the chicks got older made me wonder whether the other broods also started out with more but some died or fell prey to predators.



When I first saw them, all three families were in or near the western-most pond, but when I went back the next afternoon with a longer zoom lens, the mid-sized family were on the grass past the western pond, while the other two families were on the grass still on the eastern-side. However, the youngest family eventually entered the pond and made their way over to very near the other family to the east. I watched, interested to see if there would be any aggression between the two families if they got too close.

They were about two feet apart but neither family seemed to be

too bothered. On the other hand if any humans came too close the male would stretch out his neck down low and approach with threatening movements. This was not always enough and it seems that they could be intimidated after all.

This was evident when some people obliviously walked by too close sending all 25 ducks and ducklings scurrying back to the safety of the water.

Both families were co-mingled and for a few moments all seemed fine. The ducklings didn't seem to care who they hung with, but suddenly the male of the youngest family decided to sort out his brood and began aggressively attacking any duckling that wasn't his, chasing them away from his family. He even seemed like he was trying to drown them, pushing and holding them underwater. He was so aggressive that I feared for the life of one poor little mite that he hounded into the reeds in the middle of the pond and I didn't see it reappear. My view however was obstructed by the island, but once all the feathers settled and the two families regrouped, I counted, and yes there were still nine. In fact, one lone duckling was on the opposite bank and I noticed one parent making quite a fuss over it while the others swam to join them, so perhaps this was the same one.



What amazed me however, was that the parents of the attacked family calmly sat by, sometimes seeming to prefer the company of the attacking adults and making no effort to interfere or defend their young.

This event happened a second time and this time I had a different viewpoint. Again the adult male ruthlessly attacked the older ducklings and again chased one into the reeds near the island, forced it underwater, before finally swimming away. Myself and another onlooker anxiously watched the spot where the young duckling went under and it didn't appear that it was going to come back up. It was a full minute or two before, with relief, we saw it pop back up and swim towards its parents.

The parents don't even call to their young to try to guide them to safety so these poor harassed chicks, who are quite happy to hang out with their cousins, swim aimlessly not knowing in which direction to go for safety, and on this second occasion, five of them ended up on the far side of the pond: the parents and four chicks on one side and the aggressing family between them. They had to wait for the aggressors to move further down and leave the pond before they felt safe enough to swim back to join mum and dad.

Returning to Edison Park two weeks later revealed that all the ducklings had survived, so the decreasing number of chicks in the 'older' families was most probably a coincidence. However, there were now two more young families; one with four chicks and the youngest with eight (very young), making a total of 41 ducklings in Edison Park this season. Wow!

Alison Milton

Road safety

Still on duck stories, after being exhilarated by the ducklings at Edison Park, one Friday evening on the way home from work, I decided to see if there were any ducklings at Lake Ginninderra. Since it was lat-ish I didn't wander too far, just to the revamped area near the skate park where I did find a family with four ducklings, but not very interesting.

Returning to the mall (much later than I expected) I had just crossed the street from the lake back towards the mall when I encountered a family of ducks (with 13 ducklings) just making their way along the footpath towards the lake.

Wondering (and a bit concerned) if they were going to attempt to cross the road, which was still very busy, I retrieved my camera and followed. Not wanting to scare them onto the road, I was able to make my way onto a grassy bank to observe.

Oblivious of everything else, they continued to the road edge still pecking at the grass. Traffic was stopped at the light and with perhaps the worst timing, the parents decided to lead their young across the road just as the lights changed. Thankfully, the drivers had been observant and the family managed to cross both lanes of traffic in complete safety

Alison Milton.



Black Ridge

The November activity was a trip out to Black Ridge. Rosemary and Dierk von Brehens have a share in a property part way between Bredbo and Cooma and generously offered a visit.

After the torrential rain storm in Canberra on the previous Thursday it was possible that the track was muddy and impassible but this was not the case.

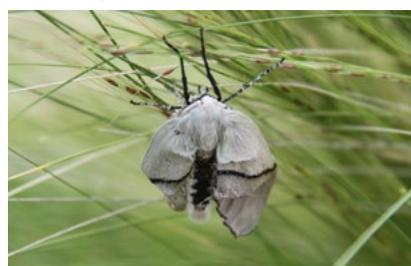
Access was 4-wheel drive only so the party met in Bredbo to car pool.

Access to the property is actually through a few other private properties: the first with newly shorn sheep who thought it was a good idea to lay on the road to soak up the sun. Another farmed deer (only seen briefly when leaving at the end of the day).

The first stop was just inside the gates of the property; down to a dam with tadpoles, damsel flies and other interests; the body of an interesting bee who did not survive its venture into the dam. Then a wander into the woodlands.



One observation of interest was a moth still in the process of drying out after emerging from her chrysalis.



We observed many flora, of which Rosemary kept a list but there were also marvels of old magnificent eucalypt trees that are now just a skeleton of themselves.

The scar on one tree stump looked as if it had been used to carve out a carrier for an aboriginal baby.



Another tree displayed (recent) scratches that were perhaps attributed to deer from the neighbouring property. The fences are not good and indeed we did later discover that a fallen tree had flattened one section of the adjoining fence.

The colours and textures in the tree bark were wonderful as were some of the old remnants of once magnificent trees.

One small red flower was minutely examined with a hand lens amidst varying speculation on its identity. It was later thought to be a *Gonocarpus* sp; creeping raspweed.

Coming across a small patch of St John's wart we noticed that there were a lot of bronze beetles on the flower heads (the next day on another walk I was informed that a beetle had been

Trip report

introduced to attack this plant) but the surprise was that on breaking off the seed head of one of these plants, among the bronze beetles was one that was a bright iridescent blue.



Someone's sharp eyes spotted two well camouflaged creatures on the gum trees: a spider and another insect; can you see them?



After ambling around this area we headed back to the cars and proceeded towards the cottage, making two stops along the way.

At the top of a steep descent we stopped to admire the view

incidentally finding a green hood orchid right next to the track.

The second stop was where the road was being diverted due to a fallen eucalypt that was still being held up by other trees, but was perhaps in danger of falling across the road. Stopping on the other side of the detour we again were lucky enough to find a bearded orchid and also a donkey orchid.

We arrived at the cottage for lunch. The stone cottage had been rebuilt. It was fairly basic with just two rooms but was very functional. In the eaves of the 'patio' were three swallow's nests (with chicks in at least one) and an old Willie wagtail nest.

A creek ran through the property a few metres distance. On the western side (where we were) there was a deep gorge with a steep sandy bank but strangely the eastern side was at creek level. Rosemary had gone down the day before and reported that early that morning she had seen numerous pardalotes flying around the top of the creek bank.

Clearly visible from the cottage, near the creek was a very large toadstool. I went down to take a photo and it was so large that I swear I saw a hobbit run away round the back.



I then made my way down to the creek where there were numerous pardalote nest holes in the sand bank. Bill also came down and we saw activity at two of the nests; one near to top of the cliff and the other at almost eye level. I therefore concentrated my efforts on the nest at eye level with the parents making regular trips to feed their young.

In the meantime, most of the others had set off to explore and I eventually managed to catch up with them in time see a large eucalypt that had scratchings from a koala.

The group had already visited the 'erosion gully' where they were trying to stop the erosion and where they had found a bearded orchid with two flower heads in bloom. Dierk offered to lead me back to find the orchid, which we did. We also found the hoof prints of a family of goats. We had heard the bleats of a young goat earlier and the hoof prints showed that there was at least one very young goat. (As we were leaving one person did see about 20 goats of varying ages flee into the bushes.)

A field of wild mustard provided a wondrous display of yellow, reminding some of canola fields.

Rosemary also gave us the history of the property and how they and other Field Naturalists originally became partners in this property, and their efforts to preserve the landscape.

A very interesting and enjoyable trip. Thank you to Rosemary and Dierk.

Alison Milton



Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra Inc.

Who are the Field Naturalists?

The Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra (FNAC) was formed in 1981. Our aim is to foster interest in natural history by means of meetings and regular field outings. Meetings are usually held on the first Thursday of each month. Outings range from weekend rambles to long weekends away. Activities are advertised in our monthly newsletter. We emphasise informality and the enjoyment of nature. New members are always welcome. If you wish to join FNAC, please fill in the member application below and send it in with your subscription to the FNAC Treasurer at the address below.

President: Rosemary von Behrens **Phone:** 6254 1763

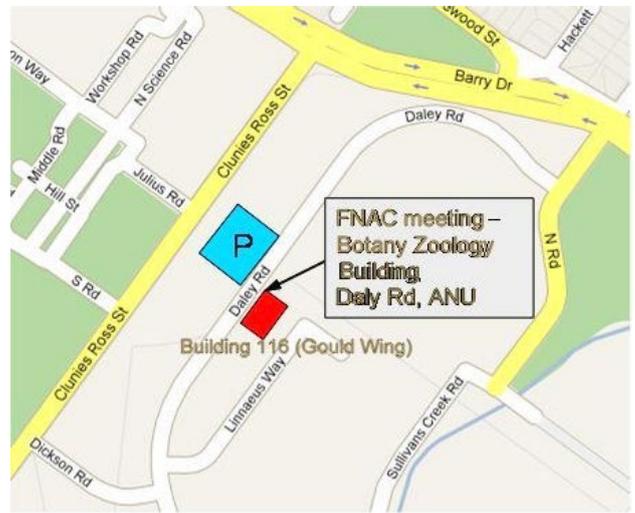
Email: fieldnaturalist@yahoo.com.au

Website: under construction

All newsletter contributions welcome.

Email: alison.milton@health.gov.au

Editor



Monthly meeting venue: Division of Botany and Zoology, Building 116, Daley Rd, Australian National University. (The Xmas meeting is at the adjacent building 44 and will start at the earlier time of 6:30 pm.)

Field Naturalists' Association of Canberra
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Canberra ACT 2601



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION OR RENEWAL

Family name: First name:

If a family membership, please include the first names of other members of the family:

.....

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Subscription enclosed: \$.....(Single/Family \$25) Donation: \$.....

How did you hear about FNAC? Please circle: FRIEND? OTHER? Please specify: